

Mentoring in the Induction Phase: Effective Mentoring for Career Starters in Austria – A Gender Comparison

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Abstract

This article presents and discusses the results of a nationwide survey conducted in Austria among young professionals (n = 742), focusing on their self-assessment of the importance of mentoring support, mentoring style, and mentoring collaboration during the induction phase. The quantitative analysis includes frequency distributions and p-values based on the Mann–Whitney U test, with a particular focus on gender differences.

The data is based on feedback from teachers (n = 742) in their first year of service. Notably, male career starters report particularly high satisfaction with mentoring support. They also place greater value on informal discussions and feel that their actions are more closely monitored compared to their female counterparts. However, in many aspects of mentoring style and collaboration, no statistically significant gender differences were found.

Keywords: mentoring, mentoring practices, mentee assessments, teacher education, internship

1. Introduction

In an increasingly diverse society, in which gender is no longer thought of exclusively in binary terms, gender competence is becoming increasingly important in the educational context (Stadler-Altmann, 2013) and thus also in mentoring. Mentoring relationships are based on communication, trust and the promotion of individual development (Dammerer, 2022; Ziegler et al. 2022). It is therefore all the more important that mentors are able to recognise and respect the mentees' gender identity - even beyond the binary norm - and deal with it professionally. Gender competence therefore does not primarily comprise pure specialist knowledge, but rather requires reflective competence (Budde & Venth, 2009), which critically scrutinises gender images, power relations and inequalities and examines individual needs. The focus of this study is on the gender comparison in mentoring in order to gain differentiated insights into gender-specific approaches in mentoring.

Formal mentoring for teachers starting their careers is still in its infancy in Austria, having been introduced in 2019 (Dammerer & Ziegler, 2022). Some findings on mentoring in Austria are available so far (Dammerer, 2025), but studies on mentoring in induction in the context of gender cannot yet be cited. As the following paragraphs show, gender does have a considerable influence on the perception of mentoring support, the mentoring process and the mentoring relationship, which is why this article deals with the significance of gender in the mentoring of teachers at career entry. Numerous findings can be found in the international research literature.

Whether men and women have comparable mentoring experiences has been addressed in numerous publications (Wanberg et al., 2003) and meta-analyses (Kammeyer-Mueller and Judge, 2008; O'Brien et al., 2010). Theoretical assumptions suggest that women are less likely to find mentors and receive less psychosocial support due to barriers such as stereotypes and limited networks (Noe, 1988; Ragins, 2002). Especially in mixed-gender mentoring dyads, role models and psychosocial support occur less frequently, as mentors would have to move outside their comfort zone. Empirical studies partially support these assumptions: Ragins and Cotton (1991) found that women perceive greater difficulties in accessing mentoring than men. They report barriers such as a lack of availability, low willingness on the part of potential

mentors, social disapproval and misunderstandings about expectations of the mentoring relationship. However, empirical findings contradict the assumption that women receive less mentoring. Meta-analyses (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; O'Brien et al., 2010) show no gender differences in the likelihood of having a mentor or receiving career-related mentoring; women even reported more psychosocial mentoring than men.

There could be several reasons for this discrepancy between theory and empirical research: The perceived barriers might not actually exist, women might make more of an effort to seek mentoring, or mentoring for men and women might differ in type and focus. Another explanation is that women subjectively perceive more mentoring even though they objectively receive less. Studies on the agreement between mentors and mentees show that perceptions often differ (Welsh et al., 2012). This suggests that methodological differences may distort the actual mentoring experience.

A study on formal mentoring relationships analysed factors that favour greater agreement between mentors and mentees (Fagenson-Eland et al., 2005). It was found that differences in seniority and age reduced the match, while gender differences had no significant influence. However, this finding does not answer the question of whether men and women perceive mentoring relationships in the same way. It is possible that both genders rate a relationship similarly when it comes to relative categorisation (i.e. whether a relationship provides a high or low level of mentoring). However, they may differ in their perception of the absolute amount of mentoring. This distinction is important, as higher levels of mentoring have been shown to be related to positive subjective and objective career outcomes for mentees (Eby et al., 2013).

In addition, a study on the gender comparability of the Mentoring Function Questionnaire ("MFQ-9") found that there are differences between men and women (Hu, 2008). Since different mentoring relationships were considered, an actual, non-subjective gender equivalence is not assured.

In the following, the significance of gender in the perception of mentoring will be analysed.

2. Methodological Approach and Research Design

This nationwide Austrian study focused on the questions of the extent to which gender-specific differences arise within the mentoring process in mentoring and how items on the scales of mentoring support, mentoring style and mentoring collaboration are assessed by the comparison groups mentioned (female gender versus male gender). The authors assume that female and male mentees rate the items on the scales differently. Thus, the alternative hypothesis is that there is a difference in the assessment of the scales within the comparison groups. This aspect in particular would raise interesting ideas for the educational sciences and for topics relating to reflexive gender pedagogy and training institutions when considering mentoring concepts. The extent to which female mentees perceive different mentoring practices compared to male mentees is described in more detail below.

2.1 Conception of the Questionnaire

A questionnaire, which was used as part of the national research project "Forschungsnetzwerk Berufseinstieg" in January 2024 (Pädagogische Hochschulen Österreichs, 2025), was used to find out how Austrian newly qualified teachers (NQT) succeed in starting their careers at schools. The general questionnaire format (Huber et al. 2024) contained scales on general pedagogical competence, gender and diversity competence, professional understanding, subject-specific and didactic competence. In addition, respondents answered items on the scales of personality, beliefs, emotions, self-efficacy, collaboration with directors and mentors and general professional perception. The central research question is: What quality characteristics and challenges are evident in the mentoring of career starters in a gender-specific comparison?

2.2 Sampling Procedures

The respondents were all working in the teaching profession and in their first year of service. A total of $n=751$ questionnaires were used for the analysis. Of these, $n=554$ (73.4%) were female and $n=188$ (25.5%) male. A further $n=3$ (0.4%) stated that their gender was diverse and $n=6$ (0.8%) did not state their gender. These 1.2% were not included in the analysis. The sample size is therefore $n=742$.

When asked when the newly qualified teachers (NQT) were assigned mentors, 27.8% ($n=218$) stated before the school year, 49.8% ($n=391$) at the beginning of the school year and 18.1% ($n=142$) during the school year. 4.3% ($n=34$) of the newly qualified teachers (NQT) had not yet been assigned a mentor at the time of the survey.

2.3 Data Analysis

This study focusses on the results relating to mentoring. The following representations of the statements on the scales or items on mentoring are given as relative frequencies in per cent of the responses. The distribution of the frequencies of the answers to the questions in relation to the gender of the mentee was calculated using the Mann-Whitney U test. A statistical significance level of 5 per cent ($p \leq 0.05$) was assumed as the probability of error. The statistical processing and analysis of the collected data was carried out using the statistical programme SPSS, version 27 (IBM Corporation, 2020).

3. Results

When designing the questionnaire, three scales were used as guiding principles for creating the items. The three scales are: Mentoring Support, Mentoring Style, Mentoring Collaboration. The following Tables (Table 1-6) document items for the respective scales, results as frequency distributions and p-values.

3.1 Mentoring Support

The mentoring support scale provides a table of values relating to the enjoyment of mentoring (Table 1), the time of assignment (Table 2) and the mentor's school location (Table 3), as well as forms of encounters within mentoring (Table 4). Responses to the item: "I am happy about the mentoring provided by my mentor" are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of statements on enjoyment of supervision (f=554; m=188; the p-values refer to the mean rank according to Mann-Whitney. Likert scale: 1=Yes; 2=No)

Item on mentoring support Enjoyment of mentoring (n=742)	1 (%)	2 (%)	P
<i>I am happy about the support from my mentor.</i>			
Female NQT	81,9	18,1	0,003**
Male NQT	91,0	9,0	

*significant; **highly significant

Male NQT (91%; n=188) stated significantly more frequently that they were happy to receive support from a mentor (p=0.003) than female colleagues.

At the item time of assignment of as mentor, it can be assumed with a Likert scale summary of 1,2,3 that 96.2% of female and 94% of male mentees in December 2023/January 2024 ticked that they were supervised by a mentor. In relation to the comparison group, there is no significant value for the item time of allocation. Table 2 shows the exact time of allocation.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the statements at the time of allocation (w=576; m=200; the p-values refer to the mean rank according to Mann-Whitney. Likert scale: 1=Before the school year; 2=At the beginning of the school year; 3=During the school year; 4=I have not yet been assigned a mentor)

Item on mentoring support Time of allocation (n=776)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	P
<i>My mentor was assigned to me at the following time:</i>					
Female NQT	26,2	52,1	17,9	3,8	0,460
Male NQT	33,0	43,0	18,0	6,0	

*significant; **highly significant

Table 3 illustrates that 94.8% and 96.8% of the mentors teach at the same school as their mentees. There is no significant difference between the comparison groups.

Table 3. Frequency distribution of statements on work at school (f=554; m=188; the p-values refer to the mean rank according to Mann-Whitney. Likert scale: 1=Yes; 2=No)

Item on mentoring support Work at school (n=742)	1 (%)	2 (%)	P
<i>My mentor works at my school.</i>			
Female NQT	94,8	5,2	0,254
Male NQT	96,8	3,2	

*significant; **highly significant

In the following, forms of mentoring support are listed and compared within the groups. Table 4 provides an Table of the mentees' assessments (n=752).

Table 4. Frequency distribution of the statements on the scale Forms of mentoring support (w=554; m=188; the p-values refer to the mean rank according to Mann-Whitney. Likert scale: 1=never; 2=seldom; 3=occasionally; 4=often; 5=always)

Items on forms of mentoring support (n=742)	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	P
<i>Personal interviews</i>						
Female NQT	12,5	19,1	28	21,7	18,8	0,804
Male NQT	11,7	21,8	23,9	21,8	20,7	
<i>Informal personal exchange without agreement</i>						
Female NQT	11,4	10,3	26,5	36,1	15,7	0,002**
Male NQT	6,4	11,2	19,7	37,8	25,0	
<i>Telephone calls/video calls</i>						
Female NQT	60,1	18,2	16,2	4,2	1,3	0,092
Male NQT	54,8	17,6	17,6	6,9	3,2	
<i>Exchange by email</i>						
Female NQT	58,5	19,0	16,1	5,2	1,3	0,003**
Male NQT	46,8	21,3	22,3	7,4	2,1	
<i>Text messages/voice messages via messenger services</i>						
Female NQT	34,8	19,9	26,5	16,4	2,3	0,209
Male NQT	36,7	22,3	28,7	10,1	2,1	
<i>Work shadowing: Mentor visits mentee</i>						
Female NQT	22,6	28,0	33,9	10,6	4,9	0,705
Male NQT	24,5	22,3	37,2	9,6	6,4	
<i>Work shadowing: Mentee visits mentor</i>						
Female NQT	38,3	21,7	26,0	9,9	4,2	0,832
Male NQT	35,6	24,5	27,7	6,9	5,3	
<i>Discussions between mentor and several mentees (group mentoring)</i>						
Female NQT	67,0	13,9	11,4	6,0	1,8	0,037*
Male NQT	59,0	14,4	17,0	7,4	2,1	

*significant; **highly significant

Male NQT state significantly more frequently that they engage in informal personal dialogue without an agreement ($p=0.002$) with the mentor than their female colleagues. They also exchanged information with the mentor by email significantly more often ($p=0.003$). For the item Discussions between mentor and several mentees (group mentoring), Female NQT stated significantly more frequently ($p=0.037$) that they did not use this form. There were no significant differences between the comparison groups for the other items.

3.2 Mentoring Style

The following table (Table 5) refers to the presentation of the results of the mentoring style items. The reliability test using Cronbach's alpha shows a value of 0.886.

Table 5. Frequency distribution of the statements on the mentoring style scale (f=554; m=188; the p-values refer to the mean rank according to Mann-Whitney. Likert scale: 1=does not apply; 2=tends not to apply; 3=tends to apply; 4=applies)

Items on mentoring style (n=742)	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	p
<i>My mentor shows me the necessary development steps based on my strengths and weaknesses.</i>					
Female NQT	17,0	17,9	35,2	30,0	0,339
Male NQT	10,6	16,5	45,7	27,1	
<i>My mentor systematically analyses my lessons and suggests alternatives if necessary.</i>					
Female NQT	20,2	18,2	29,8	31,8	0,597
Male NQT	15,4	19,1	35,6	29,8	
<i>My mentor supports me in realising my potential.</i>					
Female NQT	15,5	15,3	32,9	36,3	0,123
Male NQT	8,5	14,9	38,3	38,3	
<i>My mentor discusses my strengths and weaknesses with me in a collegial dialogue.</i>					
Female NQT	16,6	14,8	30,7	37,9	0,170
Male NQT	9,6	13,3	38,8	38,3	
<i>My mentor has full confidence in my work.</i>					
Female NQT	5,6	3,4	23,8	67,1	0,340
Male NQT	1,6	3,2	25,5	69,7	
<i>My mentor is open to my ideas and suggestions.</i>					
Female NQT	6,5	3,8	27,1	62,6	0,769
Male NQT	2,7	5,3	29,3	62,8	
<i>My mentor gives me a lot of freedom.</i>					
Female NQT	1,8	2,5	12,8	82,9	0,958
Male NQT	0,5	0,5	16,5	82,4	
<i>My mentor lets me plan and conduct my lessons independently.</i>					
Female NQT	2,0	0,7	8,3	89,0	0,132
Male NQT	0,5	1,1	13,8	84,6	
<i>My mentor controls how I act as a teacher.</i>					
Female NQT	34,1	31,0	21,8	13,0	0,043*
Male NQT	27,7	31,9	20,7	19,7	
<i>My mentor communicates their own ideas about being a teacher.</i>					
Female NQT	16,1	21,5	34,7	27,8	0,017*
Male NQT	10,6	17,6	37,8	34,0	
<i>My mentor has a fixed idea of a good teacher.</i>					
Female NQT	16,6	27,3	32,3	23,8	0,001**
Male NQT	8,5	20,7	41,5	29,3	
<i>My mentor is in close contact with the school management regarding my development as part of this mentoring process.</i>					
Female NQT	11,9	20,4	40,3	27,4	0,828
Male NQT	12,2	19,7	39,4	28,7	
<i>My mentor and I record development tasks in writing in a development portfolio or log.</i>					
Female NQT	43,9	20,9	21,8	13,4	0,671
Male NQT	41,5	24,5	18,1	16,0	
<i>My mentor and I regularly reflect on the mentoring process.</i>					
Female NQT	33,4	25,5	24,0	17,1	0,102
Male NQT	29,3	20,2	31,9	18,6	
<i>My mentor and I maintain a confidential, collegial relationship.</i>					
Female NQT	5,8	4,2	24,7	65,3	0,006**
Male NQT	1,6	3,2	19,7	75,5	

*significant; **highly significant

Male NQT are significantly more likely than their female colleagues to believe that the mentor controls their actions as a teacher ($p=0.043$) and communicates their own ideas about being a teacher ($p=0.017$). They are also highly significantly of the opinion that mentors have a fixed idea of a good teacher ($p=0.001$). Male NQT agree significantly more with the item "My mentor and I maintain a confidential, collegial relationship" ($p=0.006$) than Female NQT. There were no significant differences between the comparison groups for eleven items on the mentoring style scale.

3.3 Mentoring Collaboration

The third scale deals with the topic of mentoring collaboration. 21 items were concretised and the results of the comparison groups are presented below (Table 6). The reliability test using Cronbach's alpha shows a value of 0.953.

Table 6. Frequency distribution of the statements on the mentoring collaboration scale (w=554; m=188; the p-values refer to the mean rank according to Mann-Whitney. Likert scale: 1=never; 2=seldom; 3=occasionally; 4=often; 5=always)

Items on mentoring collaboration (n=742)	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	p
<i>Assessment criteria for employment</i>						
Female NQT	54,3	20,8	16,8	5,2	2,9	0,022*
Male NQT	46,8	18,6	22,3	9,0	3,2	
<i>Cooperation within the teaching staff</i>						
Female NQT	18,4	13,5	31,4	28,3	8,3	0,011*
Male NQT	8,0	14,9	31,4	39,9	5,9	
<i>Communication with the management</i>						
Female NQT	21,8	19,1	29,2	22,0	7,8	0,317
Male NQT	15,4	23,9	27,1	27,7	5,9	
<i>Role clarity</i>						
Female NQT	27,3	17,7	25,1	23,1	6,9	0,011*
Male NQT	11,7	24,5	29,8	29,3	4,8	
<i>School organisation</i>						
Female NQT	15,7	14,6	27,4	31,4	10,8	0,553
Male NQT	8,0	16,0	34,0	36,2	5,9	
<i>School quality/school development</i>						
Female NQT	29,1	22,4	25,6	16,8	6,1	0,005**
Male NQT	19,7	18,6	33,0	24,5	4,3	
<i>Administrative activities</i>						
Female NQT	17,7	17,3	28,7	27,4	8,8	0,062
Male NQT	6,9	21,3	31,9	31,4	8,5	
<i>Legal framework conditions</i>						
Female NQT	21,1	20,9	31,2	19,1	7,6	0,074
Male NQT	16,0	14,9	41,0	21,8	6,4	
<i>Semester/annual planning</i>						
Female NQT	18,1	16,8	33,9	22,0	9,2	0,093
Male NQT	14,4	14,4	32,4	31,9	6,9	
<i>Timetabling</i>						
Female NQT	18,8	17,0	28,3	24,2	11,7	0,313
Male NQT	13,8	17,6	30,3	27,1	11,2	
<i>Teaching methods</i>						
Female NQT	17,5	13,9	28,7	28,2	11,7	0,043*
Male NQT	7,4	16,0	31,4	33,5	11,7	
<i>Individualisation/differentiation</i>						
Female NQT	24,9	15,7	27,1	23,3	9,0	0,417
Male NQT	15,4	17,6	38,8	22,9	5,3	
<i>Performance appraisal</i>						
Female NQT	17,0	17,1	27,3	29,1	9,6	0,001**
Male NQT	6,9	9,6	38,8	33,5	11,2	
<i>Specialist competences</i>						
Female NQT	23,5	16,2	28,7	24,2	7,4	0,005**
Male NQT	11,2	16,5	35,6	28,2	8,5	
<i>Didactic-methodological competences</i>						
Female NQT	19,1	13,9	32,1	26,2	8,7	0,057
Male NQT	10,6	12,8	37,8	31,9	6,9	
<i>Class leadership/classroom management</i>						
Female NQT	19,9	15,7	24,9	28,5	11,0	0,171
Male NQT	11,2	17,0	30,9	30,9	10,1	
<i>Disciplinary challenges</i>						
Female NQT	15,5	14,3	24,5	31,8	13,9	0,188
Male NQT	8,5	11,7	32,4	24,6	12,8	
<i>Teacher-student relationship</i>						
Female NQT	19,5	15,9	24,7	29,8	10,1	0,299
Male NQT	9,0	16,5	36,7	29,8	8,0	
<i>Parent work</i>						
Female NQT	23,2	20,9	30,7	17,7	7,4	0,782
Male NQT	21,3	22,3	34,6	18,1	3,7	
<i>Work-life balance/personal stress</i>						
Female NQT	30,9	21,5	25,3	16,2	6,1	0,872
Male NQT	26,6	23,9	31,4	14,4	3,7	
<i>Private topics</i>						
Female NQT	28,9	26,2	30,3	10,6	4,0	0,015*
Male NQT	20,7	26,1	33,5	14,4	5,3	

*significant; **highly significant

Significant differences in the comparison groups can be seen in the items on assessment criteria for employment ($p=0.022$), cooperation with colleagues ($p=0.011$), role clarity ($p=0.011$), school quality/school development ($p=0.005$), teaching methods ($p=0.043$), performance appraisal ($p=0.001$), professional competences ($p=0.005$) and private topics ($p=0.015$). There were no significant differences for the other items.

4. Interpretation and Discussion

The results of the Austria-wide survey of career starters in their first year of service in relation to the self-assessment of the importance of mentoring support, mentoring style and mentoring collaboration reveal gender-specific differences in the disparities between women and men. Although the survey takes into account the option "diverse" as a gender category, the number of mentions of this group is too low to carry out a statistically reliable evaluation or differentiated analysis. The researchers' alternative hypothesis that the comparison groups, female versus male mentees, have different perceptions of mentoring can be confirmed.

As Haas et al. (2023) also found a positive attitude towards mentoring on the part of the mentees, this study also shows a clear expression of enjoyment of the mentoring support from the perspective of those entering the profession. The positive perception of the teachers at the start of their careers suggests a successful fit between the objectives of the mentoring programme and the individual needs of the mentees and the mentors. This emotionally positive feedback is evidence of a significant qualitative indicator of mentoring for career entry. However, differences between men and women similar to the study by Ragins and Cotton (1991) can be identified. For example, 91% of Male NQT and 81.8% of Female NQT were pleased with the mentoring support. These results do not provide any information about the nature or quality of the mentoring relationship or the collaboration. It is possible that male teachers at the start of their careers experience mentoring more as confirmation and support than female teachers, or that their expectations of mentoring are set differently and are fulfilled. The assumption that women have higher expectations of mentoring and therefore expect more professional, structural and possibly also personal support cannot be ruled out. These different expectations can possibly be explained by social experiences, structural conditions and professional socialisation processes. The high significance opens up the conclusion that women and men have different expectations of mentoring. A gender-sensitive design of mentoring processes is therefore essential in order to do justice to different biographical experiences, structural challenges and the different expectations of women and men and thus promote equal development opportunities.

Successful career entry requires not only formal, but also informal mentoring (cf. Kemmis et al., 2014; Dammerer & Ziegler, 2022). In a gender-specific comparison of forms of mentoring support, the data from this study shows a high significant value in the response "informal personal exchange without agreement". Male career starters tend to experience informal, unofficial dialogue with their mentors more often than female career starters. Possible reasons could be cultural, structural or psychological. However, these cannot be empirically proven. As a guiding norm for action, , mentors can consciously hold informal conversations with Female NQT at the start of their careers in various situations in order to promote informal dialogue.

E-mail exchange offers a written, low-threshold opportunity to exchange information and maintain contact, especially when personal meetings cannot take place regularly due to time or location barriers (Ensher et al., 2003). Furthermore, the written, electronic method of communication may maintain a formal distance from hierarchies. In this study, male mentees exchanged information with their mentors significantly more often than female mentees. Dependencies with regard to the gender of the mentor are not recorded and therefore do not allow any statements to be made about same-sex communication structures. The data points to gender-specific communication styles or possibly also to different approaches to hierarchies. For mentoring, digital forms of communication should therefore be systematically integrated in order to enable continuous availability, individual support and gender-sensitive communication and relationship design.

In this study, more male than female career starters stated that they were in a group mentoring programme. No conclusions can be drawn from this, as the form of mentoring of individual mentees or several mentees at the same time is set by the mentoring staff and no data is available on the mentors' allocation modalities.

No gender-specific differences can be identified in the other forms of mentoring support (Dammerer, 2020), such as contact via face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, text messages via messenger services or mutual job shadowing.

In the mentoring style, four items (control, own understanding of the profession, ideas about the profession and confidential collegial relationship with the mentor) show significance in relation to gender.

Excessive control in mentoring can lead to a feeling of restricted autonomy (Keller-Schneider, 2014). The statement "My mentor controls how I act as a teacher" is rated significantly higher by male participants than by female participants. Thus, controlling behaviour on the part of the mentor could be connoted by female mentees more as support and guidance. Whereas male mentees, on the other hand, could possibly perceive controlling behaviour on the part of the mentor as a feeling of being "patronised". This would be based on a desire for independence and self-determination, and thus

controlling behaviour on the part of the mentor would be experienced as an encroachment on their autonomy as soon as they start their career.

Male career starters rate the mentor's communication about their own ideas of being a teacher higher than female career starters. Here, mentors pass on their own understanding of the teaching profession. Values, convictions, pedagogical attitudes and role concepts are communicated both implicitly and explicitly in the mentoring process. From the perspective of gender research, these differences could be attributed to gender-specific expectations and role patterns. For example, male career starters apparently attach greater importance to an explicit presentation of pedagogical attitudes and role models. There appears to be an orientation towards structures and role models. This form of communication can be an important orientation aid for them in the process of finding their professional identity. Female career starters, on the other hand, tend to give less weight to this aspect, possibly due to their interest in relationship-oriented, reflective or dialogue-based processes.

The idea that mentors have of a good teacher is also rated higher by male subjects than by female subjects. One possible interpretation could be that female career starters take a more differentiated and critical approach to a predetermined role model of a "good teacher".

The statistically significant difference in agreement with the item "My mentor and I maintain a confidential, collegial relationship" indicates that Male NQT rate the relationship with their mentor significantly more positively than Female NQT at the start of their careers. Interpretatively, this could be due to gender-specific differences in the way the relationship is organised. It is possible that male teachers at the start of their careers experience the mentoring relationship as more collegial and confidential than female teachers. This could in turn be due to the different expectations of the mentoring process and of the mentors. However, contextual effects such as school climate, age, previous experience and similar factors were not taken into account in this study.

In the survey on mentoring style, no gender-specific characteristics can be identified in relation to the mentor's identification of necessary development steps, the analysis of lessons and the identification of alternatives as well as support in the development of potential. Furthermore, the comparison groups also showed no characteristics for the items discussion of strengths and weaknesses in a collegial dialogue, trust in the actions and openness towards the ideas and conceptions of those entering the profession. Freedom as well as independent planning and implementation show no differences in the gender characteristics female versus male. There were also no correlations between the mentor's cooperation with the school management and the recording of development tasks in a portfolio. Regular reflections on the mentoring process also show no relevant gender differences. Accordingly, mentees predominantly receive equal support from their mentors regardless of gender. A gender-neutral implementation of the mentoring style of mentors can be assumed.

Of twenty-one items in the topic area of mentoring collaboration, eight items show differences in relation to gender. Male NQT at the start of their careers discuss the following topics with their mentors more frequently than female career starters: Assessment criteria for employment, performance appraisal, professional competences and private issues. The topics of collaboration within the team, role clarity, school quality and school development, work-life balance and personal stress are mentioned more frequently as topics of discussion in the mentoring process by female participants. It can be noted that male mentees appear to use mentoring more as an instrument for professional positioning and professional optimisation. In contrast, female mentees seem to use mentoring more as a space for reflection, self-positioning within the team, dealing with stress and work-life balance. As a limitation, it should be noted that this study does not record by whom - mentee or mentor - the respective topics of discussion were initiated. It therefore remains unclear whether the gender-specific differences in the thematisation of content can be attributed to the needs and interests of the mentees or to the mentor's offer or conduct of the conversation.

5. Conclusion

The present findings offer differentiated insights into gender-specific dynamics within mentoring, particularly regarding disparities between women and men. Due to the small number of respondents identifying as non-binary or gender-diverse, their perspectives could not be adequately included in the quantitative analyses. The data reveal a substantial influence of gender on the perception of mentoring support, the mentoring process, and the mentor-mentee relationship when comparing male and female participants. This study documents gender-related dynamics in mentoring, particularly in the interplay between control and support.

These results underscore the necessity of a gender-sensitive design of mentoring processes, in order to account for varying biographical backgrounds, structural challenges, and differentiated expectations across genders. A reflexive and inclusive approach enables the recognition of diversity at the start of a professional career, promotes constructive engagement with difference, and actively supports equal opportunities.

At the same time, the findings indicate that key aspects of mentoring style show no statistically significant gender-related differences. This applies to both content-related and relational dimensions. Gender does not, therefore, appear to be a decisive influencing factor in mentoring style. These results suggest a high degree of professionalism and standardisation in mentoring practices, which allow for individualised support and collegial guidance irrespective of gender. This level of practice is already being implemented in existing mentoring processes.

In contrast, the area of mentoring collaboration reveals gender-specific differences concerning the articulation of concerns, expectations, and reflective needs. However, a limitation of this study is that it did not record who initiated the topics discussed during mentoring conversations. Consequently, it remains unclear whether the identified differences stem from the active needs of the mentees or are shaped by the mentors' dialogue strategies and topic selection. This limitation highlights the importance of future research capturing interactional dynamics and responsibility for initiating topics in the mentoring process.

Mentoring is fundamentally based on trust, communication, and the clarification of roles. Adopting a gender-sensitive perspective within mentoring involves raising awareness of potential differences and their implications. The aim is to engage openly and reflexively with experiences of difference, while avoiding premature normative assumptions. Critical and reflective discussions within the mentoring relationship can make a valuable contribution in this regard.

This gives rise to a call for person-centred mentoring, tailored to the individual needs, experiences, competences, personality, and goals of mentees. In this context, gender competence becomes a key element of professional development for mentors. Recognising, reflecting on, and critically addressing structural inequalities and gender-related dynamics is essential in providing professional support for individuals at the beginning of their careers. Accordingly, gender competence should be firmly integrated into the training and continuing education of mentoring personnel.

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